

**Testimony Regarding
H.B. 5037, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium
Ending June 30, 2023**

Lisa Hammersley, Executive Director
School and State Finance Project

Chairwomen Osten and Walker, Ranking Members Miner and France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Governor Lamont's proposed budget adjustments for fiscal year 2023. Simply put, the governor's proposed budget does not provide the necessary funding, meet the long-term mental health and social-emotional needs of our students, or take the steps needed to reduce the alarming economic and racial disparities in Connecticut education funding.

Over the last two years, we have watched our educators, parents, and students navigate distance and hybrid learning during the global COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen the struggles they face, struggles that have only exacerbated the inequities within Connecticut's public school system.

While one-time COVID relief dollars from Congress have helped school districts better meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students during another year of uncertainty and disruption, these one-time funds will soon expire and districts will no longer be equipped with the funds necessary to continue these essential services.

Unless action is taken, the ending of this funding could mean discontinuing programs, eliminating teacher and staff positions, and a lack of support services for students who will still be facing academic and mental health challenges as a result of the pandemic.

Unfortunately, Governor Lamont's proposed budget falls short of helping districts and schools prepare for this looming fiscal cliff, nor does it provide the funding needed to address the longstanding economic and racial disparities in Connecticut education funding. Connecticut can, and must, do better for its students, teachers, and communities, and that starts by fully funding the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula when the federal relief dollars expire.

Fully funding the ECS formula would allow Connecticut's districts to continue offering services and resources made possible by federal ESSER funding, and provide them with the necessary funds to invest in the support programs, teachers, and staff that will make a real tangible difference in the lives and education of our students.

Under the current ECS formula, students in underfunded districts will not see the full education funding they are entitled to until FY 2028. Six more years is far too long for our

students to wait to receive the education funding they need and deserve. Our elementary school students should not have to wait until they're in high school to receive a properly funded education.

Our students and educators have demonstrated an incredible amount of flexibility and resilience through such uncertain times and we owe it to them to finally provide the funding they need in order to be successful.

We must do more for our students than what the governor has proposed, and we must find a way to stabilize the fiscal cliff that will be created once federal ESSER funds run out.

I ask the Committee to reject the governor's proposal and instead pass a student-centered funding system this legislative session that fully funds the ECS formula, funds ALL public school students based on their learning needs, and finally provides the education funding and stability our students, teachers, and communities need and deserve.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on H.B. 5037, and for the chance to stress the importance of fully and equitably funding all of Connecticut's public school students. Please feel free to reach out to me via the contact information below should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lisa Hammersley
Executive Director
School and State Finance Project
lisa.hammersley@schoolstatefinance.org

About the School and State Finance Project

Founded in 2015, the School and State Finance Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy organization, focused on education funding and state finance issues, with a commitment to providing independent analysis, building public knowledge, improving transparency, and developing fair, sustainable solutions.

The organization strives to serve as a trusted, independent source of accurate data, information, and research, and is focused on:

- Increasing awareness and building public knowledge about Connecticut's education finance system, state budget, and overall fiscal health;
- Improving transparency around Connecticut's education and state finances;
- Working collaboratively to develop thoughtful, data-driven solutions that address Connecticut's education funding and state finance challenges; and
- Providing technical assistance to partner organizations seeking to solve education finance-related challenges.

For more information about the School and State Finance Project, visit www.schoolstatefinance.org.